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Making Sustainability Operational: Integrating Life Cycle Thinking into the Business Processes of a Multinational Company

The concept of life cycle management (LCM), or Product Stewardship, with its holistic mindset and toolbox approach, is gaining more and more acceptance from all stakeholder groups and specifically in industry. While not nearly as established as site oriented environmental management according to ISO 14001 or EMAS, or occupational health and safety management according to OHSAS 18001 yet, firms realize that the life cycle perspective enables a paradigm shift where environmental aspects are seen rather as an opportunity for value creation than a cost driver. Additional benefits are created if the specific implementation of life cycle management approaches does not only address environmental issues, but embraces social and economic aspects from the viewpoint of all relevant stakeholders. This focus on opportunities and value creation opens up new frontiers, where sustainability as defined by the Brundtland commission is the basis also for the long-term sustainability of the firm, ensuring stability and economic growth.

While leading companies have recognized the aforementioned potentials, the real challenge is the operational implementation of life cycle management in strategic management, product and process planning, as well as in day-to-day decision-making in research and development, manufacturing, EHS, sales and marketing, communications, etc. This challenge can only be met if life cycle approaches can be easily applied, and social and economic aspects along the life cycle can be addressed also by acknowledged and somewhat standardized methods, similar to life cycle assessment approaches according to ISO 14040.

The presentation will elaborate how the aforementioned challenges are addressed at Alcan, one of the world's leading supplier of aluminum metal and products, as well as composite components, and packaging solutions. Concepts and tools will be presented that are used for the implementation of life cycle management in the business processes, focusing not only on methodological, but also on management process development issues. Starting from a vision of long term sustainability both for the company and the relevant stakeholders, possible solutions and hands-on experiences will be discussed.